

In front of the Farm Machinery Building stands an Aeromotor windmill, dating from the early 1900s. It was originally located in Medford Township on the Ted Radel farm; later moved in 1953 to the Kenneth Reiter farm in Clinton Falls Township before being donated to the Society in 1999. It will develop about 2/3 horsepower in a 15-mph wind. A typical windmill with 12-ft. diameter wheel could pump 10 gallons of water per minute to a height of 100 feet. More than 6 million similar windmills have been erected since 1860, some also used for generating electricity. Windmills of this fan design always have 18 vanes for best efficiency. The pump below it would attach to the windmill's rod. This pump was made by the Owatonna Pump Co., located at 123 N. Cedar Street, an enterprise of Dennis Virtue and Charles Pound operating by 1903. Nearby is one of the horse watering troughs, which sat originally on Cedar Street near Central Park. The hitching stone in front of the Farm Machinery Building was originally on the Lester Corson family farm near Grand Meadow, MN.

Agriculture was the major industry in the early settlement of the area, the early crops being wheat, oats, hay and corn for the diversified family farms. Many farmers also had a few head of dairy cows. These cows served the family first, but as herds grew in size, farmers home-churned butter to sell in the villages, and later separated the cream and hauled it to creameries for commercial processing into butter or cheese. Many dairy farms emerged and the cow population at its peak in Steele County in 1943 was 25,200. As farming changed and specialized, grain farms replaced many of the dairy herds formerly populating the countryside. Today there are about 100 dairy farms and only one privately operated creamery in the county. The principal crops grown are corn and soybeans. Other livestock enterprises in the county include hog farms, turkey farms, elk, red deer, and buffalo enterprises.

The Village's Farm Machinery Building was constructed in 1984 to represent the style of early farm implement dealerships, which served the countryside. It was named Buxton-McClintock, proprietors, in recognition of one of the earliest known equipment dealers established in Owatonna, located at 121 W. Vine Street. John E. Buxton began the dealership in 1865 and later was joined in partnership with William McClintock and John Buxton's son, Charles I. In 1881 John Buxton invented and patented a Buxton Grain Binder, the patent model on exhibit here. He later sold the patent rights.

In January 1907, C.I. Buxton, while attending a farm equipment dealer convention at St. Paul's Ryan Hotel, offered his room as a meeting place for the board of the floundering Minnesota Mutual Fire Insurance Company. Minnesota Mutual, established in New Ulm in 1904, was a type of company the implement dealers were intent on acquiring to reduce dealership insurance costs. At this meeting C.I. was elected to the board and appointed to its finance committee. When C.I. became secretary of the company in 1910, he moved the home office to the National Farmers Bank building in Owatonna, then in 1911 to the second story of the Buxton- McClintock dealership. In 1917 C.I. Buxton sold his interest in the farm equipment dealership to McClintock, who later sold it to J.J. Nelson in about 1920.

The insurance firm acquired land in downtown Owatonna to construct a new building, which was formally opened in 1923. With several expansions since, the firm has become one of the largest employers in Owatonna. The firm combined

## Steele County Historical Society

### Farm Machinery Building



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with other insurance writers to offer a policy in 1926 under the name of Federated Hardware Mutuals, the first use of the term Federated, from which the present firm derives its name.

C.I. Buxton's son, John A., became its president in 1941; his grandson, C.I. Buxton, II, followed as president in 1957 until his death in 2001. It is among the top insurance companies in the United States. Financial support from Federated Insurance Companies, the Owatonna Foundation, and many individuals and community groups made this exhibit hall possible.

The interior has exhibits that are grouped according to their use in the farming sector: hand tools, land and swamp clearing equipment, hand and horse-drawn tillage and planting equipment, grain harvesting and processing equipment, hay equipment, and a display of the dairy and creamery history of Steele County.

At one time Owatonna and Steele County proclaimed themselves the butter capitol of the world with about 24 creameries in operation at the height of the industry, which peaked about 1935. Production of butter was assisted by the efficiency of the Combined Churn and Butter Worker invented by Reuben Disbrow of Owatonna and Mankato, and one-time employee of Owatonna Manufacturing Company. His patent model is among the highlights of the creamery exhibit. The manufacturing rights were obtained by OMC, which marketed it through a distributor, the Chicago Creamery Supply and Packaging Company. The Disbrow Combined Churn was among the best designs of its kind and was commonly specified by creameries across the nation.

Disbrow and his brother, Levi, also designed an improved version, which they sold under their own brand. However, the contract with OMC specified OMC owned the rights to any improvements, and thus began a lawsuit against the Disbrows and the Owatonna Fanning Mill Co., which manufactured and marketed a similar Combined Churn and Butter Worker. This lawsuit continued from 1892 through 1912, ending up in the U.S. Supreme Court and putting the Owatonna brand and its president, Dennis Virtue, out of business. OMC sold the patent in 1916; however, the heyday of that improved technology had been superseded by even newer inventions.

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*The descriptions of the buildings comes from a book entitled "A Guide to The Village of Yesteryear" - written by Jerry Ganfield (available in the Gift Shop at the History Center)*