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## Company Information

## John Deere: A Biography

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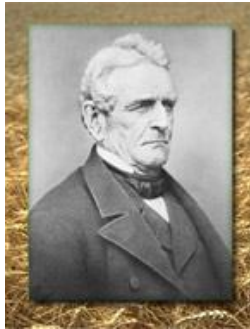
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When John Deere crafted his famous steel plow in his blacksmith shop in 1837, he also forged the beginnings of Deere & Company – a company that today does business around the world and employs approximately 52,000 people.

As we celebrate the 200th anniversary of the birth of this enterprising pioneer, it's appropriate to look back at his life and the legacy he left.

John was born in Rutland, Vermont, on February 7, 1804, and raised in nearby Middlebury. He was just 4 years old when his father was lost at sea, leaving his mother, Sarah Deere, to raise John and his five brothers and sisters. Due to his family's near poverty lifestyle, John received no more than the simplest of education.

In an effort to help out his mother, and without her knowledge, John took a job in his early teens with a tanner, where he ground bark in exchange for a small amount of money, a pair of shoes and a suit of clothes.

At the age of 17, in 1821, John left home, with his mother's blessing, to become an apprentice to a prosperous blacksmith of notable reputation in Middlebury, Captain Benjamin Lawrence. For the four-year apprenticeship, John was paid a \$30 stipend the first year, and an additional \$5 for each of the remaining years. He also received room and board and a set of clothes. Perhaps more valuable, John gained guidance from the stern, yet skilled Captain Lawrence, who not only taught him blacksmithing, but likely filled the void left by the death of John's father more than a decade earlier.

Completing his apprenticeship in 1825, an eager, young John Deere moved on to journeyman positions, where he honed his skills and learned first-hand that a blacksmith's workmanship was his signature.

John likely performed a variety of blacksmith duties, from shoeing horses and producing pots, pans and skillets, to manufacturing farm implements such as hay rakes and forks. But the most common work of blacksmiths of that time was furnishing the ironwork for stagecoaches and mills.

It was during this period that John met Demarius Lamb, a young woman attending boarding school in Middlebury. Despite the differences in their backgrounds, the two were married in 1827. John was 23, Demarius, 22.

For the next decade, John and his growing family would move from town to town throughout central Vermont searching for steady work. There was no shortage of skilled blacksmiths in the area and competition was keen. At one point, John borrowed money to buy land and build his own blacksmith shop, only to have it destroyed by fire not once, but twice. He was forced to sell the property he had just acquired, putting his dream of proprietorship on hold for the time being.

The fires had left John deeply in debt and once again, in need of a stable income. It was the 1830s, and fellow Vermonters shared John's economic woes. The state's rich timberland had been cut down, land was losing value, and the formerly rich and protected soil was washed away by a series of disastrous storms. A grasshopper plague weakened crop yields. Making matters worse, the nation's banking system was collapsing in what would become known as the "Panic of 1837."

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