

“The General” Tractors on Cedar Grove Farm

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Cedar Grove Farm lies on the South Branch of the Potomac River about five miles north of Romney, WV. The farm consists of 756 acres, much of it is woodland. Actual cropland is about 59 acres with 148 acres of pasture, making it a typical farm in this area. James Genn surveyed the farms on this part of the South Branch in the 1740's for Lord Fairfax. Young George Washington was a helper on for a short time on one of the surveying parties but not when our farm was surveyed. The surveys were generally 200 to 400 acres each and were designated Lots. Cedar Grove Farm includes Lot 29, on the west side of the river, and half of Lot 31, on the east side. It consists of five parcels total that came into the Herriott family at various times in the nineteenth century.

My father, George Ephraim Herriott, Sr. or Pappy to me, bought his first General new in 1940 through the Farm Bureau. Its serial number is 8FA632. He picked it up at the train depot in Romney, WV and drove it home from there. It was his first tractor; he only used horses before that time. The attachments were a single bottom plow, a sickle bar mower and a cultivator with fertilizer dispensers. I was born in December 1944 and my early memories include this tractor and two teams of horses working the farm.

Pappy was still doing loose hay so the barns had a hayfork with a track and a rope and pulley system for taking the loose hay off the wagon and into the haymow. In the field, The General pulled a wagon and hay loader over the windrow of hay and the hay loader brought the hay up onto the wagon where two men then placed it on the wagon with pitchforks. I first drove the General doing this hay loading operation when I was only three and a half years old as the story goes. I do know I was quite young, a year or two before I started school at five. Pappy would get the General going at idling speed in low gear and then get back onto the wagon to load with another man helping. I would follow the windrow with the tractor around the field. He would then get back off the wagon and stop the tractor because, of course, I could not reach the clutch. I was just the steering guy. From there I drove The General for various jobs as I grew older and was able to handle the tractor independently.

In the late 40's Pappy bought a used Oliver HG crawler, the tracked version of The General and it had a front-end loader. It was well worn when purchased so its use was generally limited to jobs with the loader. Then in about 1950, he purchased a new Farmall Super C with a two-bottom plow and mounted sickle bar mower. The Super C took over the jobs of plowing and mowing from the General. I don't think I ever saw either the plow or the sickle bar mower on the General after that. He said that the mowing machine was difficult to mount on the General and was also prone to breaking down. Of course, the two-bottom plow did a field much faster than the single bottom one. We were using a New Holland "square" baler for the hay by that time too. Even though a separate two-cylinder Wisconsin engine powered it, the General was so light that we only used the Super C to pull the baler and wagon behind it. The baler shook the Super C enough as it was. Our use of horses was essentially phased out by this time so I never worked horses.

Pappy's first General was getting worn after extensive usage over a dozen or so years and parts, except for the Hercules engine, were becoming hard to procure by that time. He eventually called this one "Methuselah" because he had had it so long. Before that it was just called "The General." In the early 50's, he bought a second General (Serial Number 1FA2706) for parts for the first one. This tractor turned out to be in better shape than the first one so it never ended up as a parts tractor but continued to be used on the farm until he retired in 1982. It was sold to him as an Avery so we always called it "The Avery". Perhaps the person who sold it had bought it through an Avery dealer and was confused as to its identity. It was always Cletrac orange but apparently the hood had been repainted because the "The General" decals were missing by the time we got it. It was used for various jobs including disking and dragging the fields smooth for planting, planting, pulling wagons, raking hay, and spraying the crops. About 1958 its engine was well worn so Pappy bought a new short block for it. It was the newer and larger displacement IXB3 engine used in the Avery A rather than the original IXA3 version. However all parts needed from the IXA3 engine fit it as well so it was an easy upgrade. Now "The Avery" had Avery A power and there was a noticeable power difference between the Generals with this change.

Both Generals were used extensively for belt work that included grinding feed, shelling corn, running the silage blower, sawing firewood and running a small wood planer. The first silage blower was also the corn chopper, the long corn stalks were fed into it and it chopped the corn as it blew it into the silo. Later the ensilage chopper-blower was replaced with a blower only and the corn was chopped in the field with a forage harvester. These tractors ran a lot at the maximum speed (throttle wide open in the belt notch) when filling the silos with corn silage and grinding feed. The little Hercules engines were tough. With the other tractors present, the main usage for the Methuselah was cultivating corn and belt work. It was the only tractor that was ever used for cultivation in my memory. Use of herbicides decreased its work in this area as time passed as well.

Both of these Generals are hand cranked; neither ever had electric start. The Generals are a little tricky with the hand brakes. You find that when you need to use both hands on the brakes, it leaves no hand for the steering wheel. I have used my leg and knee against the steering wheel to try to prevent it turning when braking. That was a safety factor that I believe B. F. Avery addressed on the Avery A version by changing to foot brakes when they ran out of The General hand brake parts. Another quirk is that The Generals didn't like getting wet. The magneto system easily shorted out from just a little rain. When one was out in a field and saw a rain cloud coming, it was prudent to get the tractor under the nearest shelter. If it showered, the tractor stopped until things dried out, generally with a drying of the distributor cap necessary.

The single front wheel had its unique problem too. We broke the front wheel off several times, usually when going at a fair speed in third, i.e., "high", gear raking hay. Sometimes there would be a hidden groundhog hole that was big enough for the front wheel to drop well into. Dropping the moving tractor into an immovable hole meant

something had to give. This would snap the front wheel right off the tractor. Both tractors have had their front wheel carriages re-welded more than once.

One incident with Methuselah could have had tragic consequences. At one time, among the farm helpers was Johnny, who was mentally challenged. He was not allowed to drive the tractor but of course he was interested. It was general policy to park the tractor in neutral but part of the starting procedure was to check to make sure it was actually in neutral before cranking it up. When you set the throttle about half way for starting, you would also shake the gearshift to make sure it wasn't in gear. Well when no one was watching Johnny, he decided he would start it up. It was in a shed facing a wall and had been accidentally left in gear. When Johnny cranked it, it started right up as it usually did. Johnny was between it and the wall and was about to get caught in between the tractor and wall. He was yelling "whoa" at it rather than moving out of the way. Fortunately someone was close by and stopped the tractor before he got crushed.

Another time I got the "Avery" a little wet. I was going to cross the river in an unfamiliar place that I thought was not very deep. It was a somewhat muddy backwater and when I started down the bank, it turned out to be considerably deeper than I thought. I ended up with water up to the radiator cap with the back of the tractor was mostly sticking out. We had to pull it out with another tractor. Pappy was patient with this sort of thing. We drained the fluids to get water out of the critical places, refilled it with the appropriate oil or grease and it fired up again (after getting the ignition system dried out again too). It was "no worse for the wear" for the dunking.

One winter when I was in high school, we had about three feet of a wet snow in early March. Because the farm is not easily accessible, we lived off the farm out on the local highway so I could get easy school bus access. With this snow, Pappy had just stayed at the farm to feed the animals and do the usual winter chores. But while he was staying down there with no communication (no phone), the results of his recent cardiogram came back indicating he had sustained a heart attack earlier. My mother was very worried about him and unable to contact him. My mother and I decided to walk in to make sure he was ok. We were able to follow broken paths in the snow on the neighboring farm most of way, but for the last quarter to half a mile, we had to break our own track. We were really beat when we got there. Fortunately Pappy was doing fine but at least with this news he knew he needed to watch he didn't overstress himself feeding and doing the other chores. Rather than having to walk back out, we got on "The Avery" and it plowed through all that snow like a trooper, including crossing the river. We were really happy with that little tractor that day.

We routinely used the Avery to pull wagon loads of hay across the river which challenged the little tractor when the wagon had about 80 square bales of hay on it. The technique was to fire it up wide open in second gear during the crossing. It had plenty of power but getting good traction on the loose river rocks was the problem. By doing this, it had enough momentum to roll itself and the wagon over the loose rocks and make the most of the available traction. If the forward motion were stopped or too slow, you were

stuck and would need a tow to get on across. The hay had to be loaded well or some bales could end up in the river with the rough ride.

All in all the Generals and Avery A's were great little tractors for smaller farms. They were tough, versatile and could accomplish a lot of work for their size. The "Avery" spent most of its working life with us with oversize rear tires (11.2 inch) and a tri-rib front tire instead of the original single-rib style. The tri-rib left less of a groove in the ground, which was usually desirable. With wheel weights and fluid in the rear tires, it could bring its front tire off the ground when pulling hard.

Making a living on a farm the size of Cedar Grove was a challenge. The pay was little for the long hours. My mother said a number of times to me that my father was a stoic so he very seldom showed emotion or gave serious guidance directly. It was through my mother that I learned he did not want my brothers or me to be farmers although he did say that farming paid very poorly. Thus he never taught us real farming. What we were shown was how to do the "hired hands" tasks that included operating the tractors and other equipment. I spent many hours helping on the farm from the early 1950's until I went to college in 1962. The Generals were a memorable part of this. Because my brothers are a number of years younger than I, they became farm helpers about the time I left. True to his wishes, none of us became farmers. I ended up with a Ph. D. in chemical engineering. After working another job for a couple of years, I worked nearby in a rocket motor facility for the rest of my career. I developed rocket propellants and did propellant technology support. Thus you might say I became a "rocket scientist." My brothers and I still own Cedar Grove Farm and live in the area. However we lease it to another local farmer who owns and rents several farms to have a large enough operation to be able to make a living solely farming. Because of the size of typical farms in this area, there are many part time farmers who rely on another job for much of their income.

"The Avery" was parked in a shed in 1982 when Pappy quit farming until it was restored in 2006. Because it was in running order when parked, only a few parts, such as the gasoline cap and crank holder, were missing when we restored it. Its fenders were missing when bought back in the 50's so we also had to get fenders for it. On-line research, i.e., the B F Avery Collectors and Associates site, led us to conclude from its serial number plate "The Avery" was really a 1941 General all along. I really like seeing it back in its original color after seeing the faded Cletrac orange for so many years.

Methuselah's restoration was just completed in November 2014. It was sidelined in the 70's when its motor was deemed "worn too much to be reasonably overhauled." It had been kept "under roof" since being sidelined; however one of the sheds did not provide ideal protection and rain and mist blew in causing some rusting. Unfortunately some years ago, someone walked off with its loose parts. I purchased a 1947 Avery A as a parts tractor for this restoration to make up most of the missing parts. I got it mechanically sound and running again in 2012. After making one motor out of two, its engine is once again in great shape. I took it to Helsel's Tractor Restoration in "nearby" Woodbury, PA to have minor body work completed and have it painted.

Both Generals look great now and are permanently retired. Tractor shows and parades are as near to work as they will get. They are an old boy's toys.



Figure 1 Eph on “Methuselah” before it earned its name (ca 1948).



Figure 2 “Methuselah” in the 1960's



Figure 3 “Methuselah” before restoration (2004).



Figure 4 “Methuselah” before painting (2012)



Figure 5 "Methuselah" November 2014



**Figure 6 Pappy on “The Avery” with Corncrib (ca 1970).
It was on the belt to power the cut-off saw for firewood.**



Figure 7 “The Avery” before restoration in 2006



Figure 8 “The Avery” restored



Figure 9 The restored Generals at our home (2015)