

The Family Heritage Series

A weekly discussion of Americanist truths and traditions for those "heirs of all the ages" who will have to preserve that most important inheritance of all — freedom. Produced by the Movement To Restore Decency.



Volume II

Lesson Eighty-Five

Henry Ford

LESSON IDEA

To show how Henry Ford used his own creative skills, and the principles of competitive free enterprise, to prosper himself while benefiting millions of others.

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THE ARMIES of the North and the South had barely finished burying their dead at Gettysburg, and John D. Rockefeller had hardly begun raking in profits from an oil refining business in Cleveland, when William and Mary Ford of Dearborn, Michigan, announced the arrival of their firstborn son. The date was July 30, 1863; and the infant, whose name was Henry, was destined to become one of the most famous millionaire manufacturers in America.

As the years rolled by, three more sons and two daughters were born to the Fords, and their fortunes increased with the number of their offspring. The forty acres they farmed grew to eighty, then to two hundred thirty. Their farm was known as one of the finest in the district; and in the opinion of William Ford, the best life in the world — the one he wished for each of his sons — was that of a farmer. But Henry had other ideas. In his biography he tells us: "My earliest recollection is that, considering the results, there was too much work on the place. That is the way I still feel about farming . . . There was too much hand labor on our own and all other farms of the time. Even when very young I suspected that much might somehow be done in a better way. That is what took me into mechanics — although my mother always said that I was a born mechanic."

Henry's penchant for fixing things or making things was noticeable when he was only six years old. He began collecting scraps of metal, such as old knife blades, clock springs, bolts, nuts, old files, and broken bits of farm machinery. He spent much of his spare time during his school years at the blacksmith's shop in Dearborn, learning to make tools. Eventually he built a forge and bellows in his farm workshop and found an anvil on which he could hammer hot metal into any shape he chose. As biographer Cy Caldwell writes: "He soon began to do the repairs on broken tools and farm machinery, not only on his father's farm but on the neighbors'. By the time he was twelve he was the unofficial — and usually unpaid — repairman for the entire neighborhood. He did it, not for profit, but because he loved the work. To repair something, to make it work again, was his chief delight. If anyone paid him, he used the money to buy more tools and materials . . .

"When he was thirteen, he began to build a small engine and finally constructed one that ran. And this feat, remarkable for any boy of his age, he accomplished with no materials other than pieces of scrap metal salvaged from the blacksmith shop and from broken farm machinery."

Henry's passion for mechanical work pulled him away from the farm and into the city soon after he finished grade school. His first job was as an apprentice machinist at James Flower and Company, one of the best machine shops in Detroit. Flower paid him \$2.50 a week and expected him to

