

Adolph Ronning

Pioneer inventor/engineer

The Dawson and Boyd communities might like to hear about or recall the life and accomplishments of Adolph Ronning. Ronning was born in Dawson, Minnesota in 1893, lived childhood years on a farm near Boyd where he attended grade school and graduated from Dawson High School in 1912. His life was filled with creative ideas and developing over 300 patented ideas by which he sought to help other people's work made easier.

At seven years of age, he had ideas come to mind to make farming easier. His first and very important invention was building and operating the world's first "Ensilage Harvester" of which the patent assembly was ready for field work in 1913. The Power Road Grader and more road building machinery were next. In the following year, 1915, he organized the Ensilage machine in the United States Harvester Co., later that was changed to the Ronning Machinery Co. under which name he sold the Ronning Ensilage Harvester, the Dump Blowers, and Power Road Graders and more.

International Harvester Co. soon bought his ideas of the Ensilage Harvester, using the brand name of McCormick-Deering-Ronning Ensilage Harvester. Hadfield-Penfield Co. (of England) and 21 other Road Grader companies were licensed to manufacture and sell his Power Road Grader under his patent. The Ronning Tractor Implement patents were sold to **International Harvester**, calling these ideas the **Farmall Contract**.

In releasing the **Farmall Contract** machine to the nation, **International Harvester Co.** stated: "The **Farmall System** of Horseland Farming revolutionized the old concepts of using the tractor to replace the horse for pulling. Now the tractor is the central power unit, since most of the implements are mounted directly on the tractor and thereby the farming operation can be handled by one person."

For all these revolutionary inventions in farming. Ronning was honored at a dinner at the Chicago World's Fair in 1934 as the Outstanding Person in the Agricultural Engineering field.

When Ronning was 30 years old, he led one of the largest manufacturing companies in Minneapolis. He organized the Patents Holding Corporation, a subsidiary of the Ronning Machinery Co. With the holding corporation, he licensed other companies for manufacturing his patents in exchange for royalties. These included nearly the entire road machine industry.

Adolph Ronning and his interests were now well known all around and he had called on his brothers to help this work. Edward, Adolph's oldest brother and established farmer, field-tested the new equipment on his farm at Boyd. The other brothers were part of the

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manufacturing and selling the machinery of Ronning Ensilage Harvester and Ronning Power Road Graders. There were two factories in Minneapolis and one in Stillwater.

Having patented several hundred ideas and concepts by this time (for several years he had patents issued every week), Ronning was concerned about helping the United States military in WWII. (He himself served as an Infantry Corporal and Acting Sergeant in WWI and was slated to become an Air Force officer when World War I ended.) Confident that he had ideas that could help the U.S. cause, he selected and submitted ideas in 28 subject matters and served as a consultant to the Army, Navy, Air Corps and the War College – without pay or commission offered.

His Stick Power Control was used to operate and drive the (General) Patton Army Tanks. Another patent which he donated was scheduled to control PT and Landing Craft. Ronning received a citation from the Government as one of 20 Outstanding Civilians for valuable contributions made to aid the war effort during WWII. Ronning's were selected from over 100,000 such suggestions.

Other proposals he suggested were: Propulsion system that would automatically control both the pitch and roll for carriers, battleships and ships in general; sonic detonators for destroying magnetic mines.

Ronning had been requested to design or build Army transport vehicles that would not bog down readily and have greater lateral stability. Neither Industry nor Army officials could agree who would underwrite the cost, so Ronning returned to Minneapolis and designed and built a vehicle in four months, complete with tooling for production. This all tested out very satisfactorily but WWII came to an end and Ronning dropped the project for the time being.

However, the idea led him into designing the Multi-Compensating Wheel system. He sold this idea as Roll-O-Matic Front Wheel Suspension to John Deere and Co. for exclusive use. This system became standard equipment on their row crop tractor. According to Mr. Ronning's daughter, Adair Ronning Kelley, the first proto-type was on a **Farmall B** (See picture) but after showing to **International Harvester**, they showed very little interest. This same concept led to its' use for "off and on" highway transport semi-trailers. This system has been used on motor bus, motor truck, airplane landing gears and a completely new automobile. Ronning was working on this project until he died in 1982.

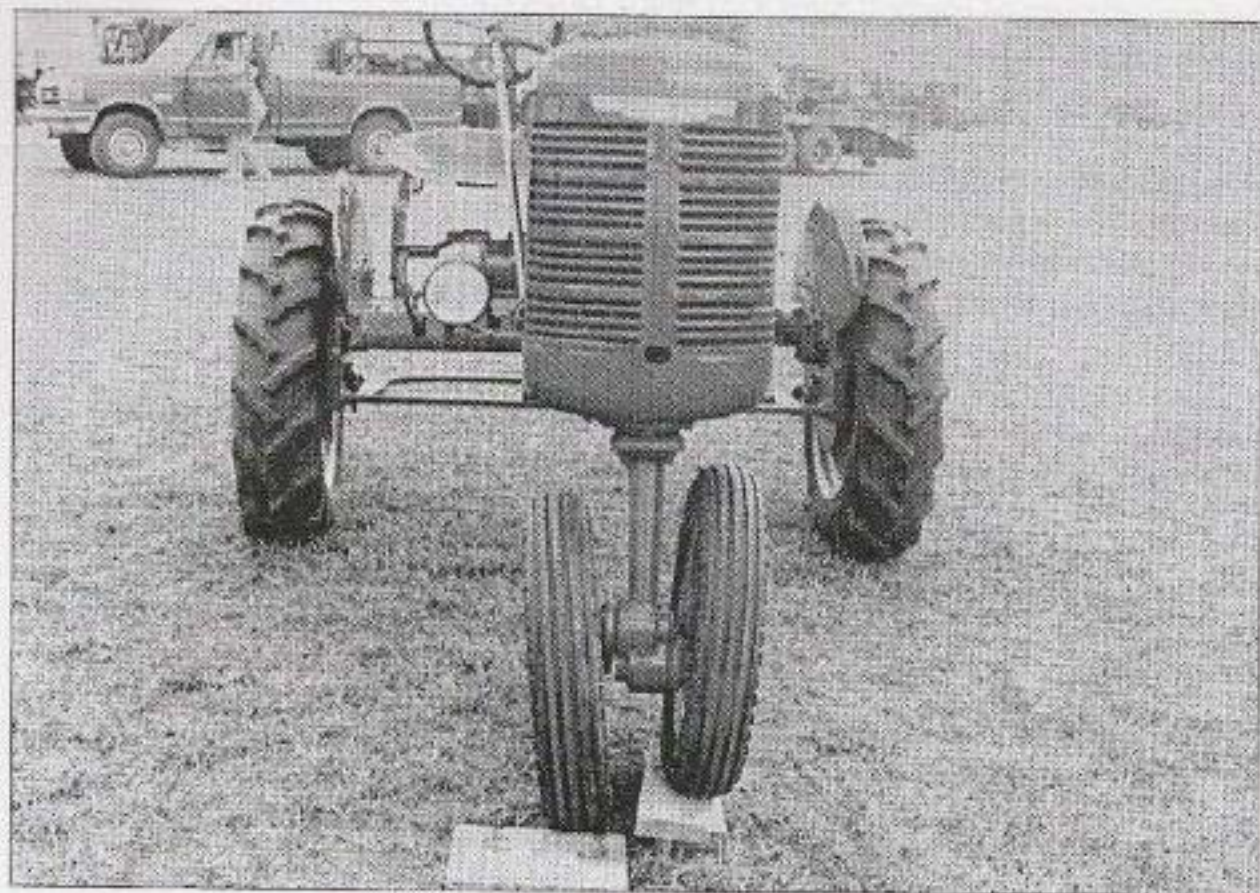
During intervening years, he also added patents on the first headlight dimmers, thermo-electric relays, the jet-prop for outboard motors; the tractor powered golf course mower (sold to Toro Co.) and other types of power mowers, magnetic motor, ignition system and more. Adolph's brother, Jacob, developed a sickle mower that he manufactured under the name of JARI Mower.

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In later years of his inventing career, Ronning was issued patents from Japan, Brazil, Italy, West Germany, France, the United Kingdom, Canada, and many in the U.S. He had 30 patent contracts with 27 different corporations including those mentioned and such as the Caterpillar Tractor Co., numerous Road Grader Companies, Allis Chalmers, Maytag Washer, and the U.S. Government.

Adolph and his wife, Hildur, whom he married in 1921 in Minneapolis, lived there for 43 years. They parented two daughters. Daughter Ruth passed away about 25 years ago. Hildur Adair (most familiarly called Adair) lives in rural Montevideo, Minnesota with her husband Richard T. (Dick) Kelley. The Kelley's have two daughters – Helene and Tracie. Adolph Ronning died in 1982 in Phoenix, Arizona at the age of 89 years, having retired there in 1955.

Most of this article was reproduced with permission from Dawson Sentinel Issue of May 23, 2001. Article written by Sentinel Associate News Editor, Gladys Thoen. Also like to thank Adair Ronning Kelley for her permission and Conrad Fiskness (President Minnesota Chapter #15) for sending us the article and picture and making this all happen. I will also thank John Deere for using one of their trademarks (Roll-O-Matic). Conrad thinks that the term Farmall Contract might be where IH got the idea for Farmall Tractors and he might be right.



Farmall B prototype with Roll-O-Matic front wheels.