

Historical Clippings

Three Lakes Museum

February 2021

Three Lakes Winter Carnival January 31, 1926

The last weekend of January in 1926 found Three Lakes residents celebrating their first Winter Carnival on the ice of Range Line Lake. Although there was a ski slide designed by Cy Williams built above the hill on the east side of the lake and various other games and entertainment, the big attraction was the area's first snowmobile race. It was a neighborly yet serious competition pitting Bill Neu, driving for the Badger Garage of Three Lakes, against Henry Hanson driving for the Strong and Manly Ford Garage of Eagle River. Both men were driving Ford Model T's outfitted with winter conversion kits that replaced the front wheels with runners and added an extra set of rear wheels all surrounded by a set of tracks. Ultimately the race became one between mechanics with the Badger Garage out engineering the Eagle River team. Henry Hanson's vehicle broke down and he was unable to finish the race. Neu was given a hero's hurrah by the Three Lakes crowd and was awarded a .22 caliber rifle for coming in first place.



On the Left Eagle River Ford Garage, Henry Hanson, driver
On the Right Three Lakes Badger Garage Winner, William Neu, driver.
Note the ski jump in the background.

A Snowmobile ?



Around 1910 when plowed roads as we know them were virtually non-existent and conventional wheeled vehicles were often sidelined until warm weather returned, Ford garage owner Virgil White of New Hampshire started working on a vehicle that could be used year-round. By 1913 he patented the Model T Conversion kit used by the two race teams in the Three Lakes snowmobile race. He called his business The Snowmobile Company.

The idea took off slowly but once people actually saw them in action, sales jumped. Demand dropped off in the late 1920's though as the use of snow plows became common.

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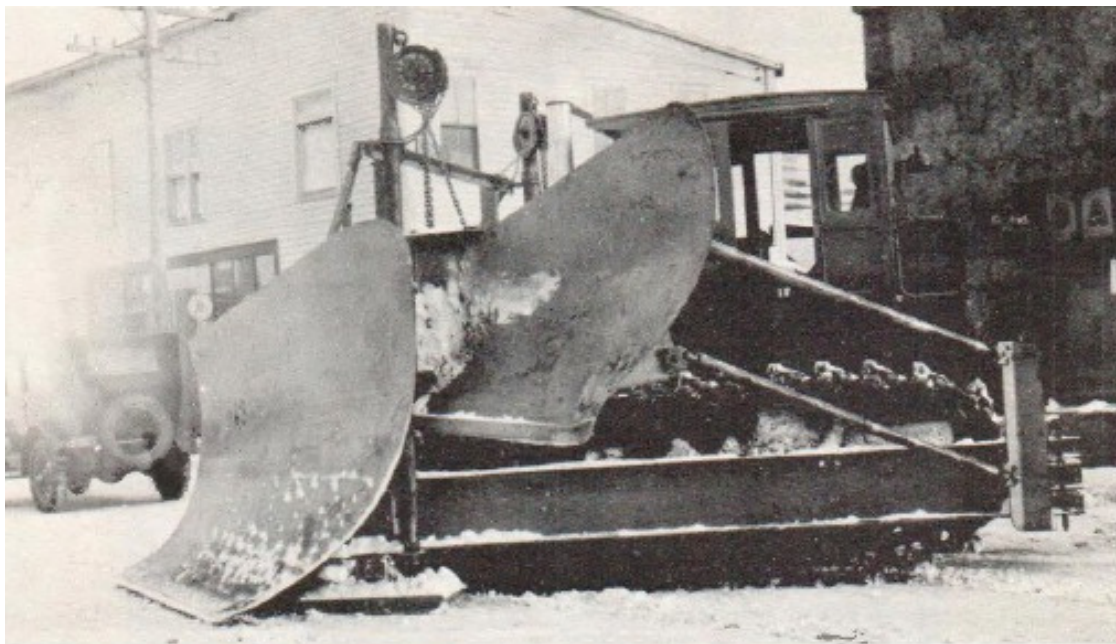
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To see the Model T snowmobile conversion in action, use the QR Code



The rest of the story (and more) can be read in *Eighty Years in God's Country* by Ed Epler for sale soon in the Three Lakes Museum Visitor Center

From the Archives



**Ten ton Holt Tractor — with Wausau Plow
Owned by the Town of Three Lakes.**



Images from *Eighty Years in God's Country* by Ed Epler

