

## IH Sawmill in Deering, Missouri

Deering, Missouri was a small lumber town in the bootheel of Missouri. For those of you that have never heard of the bootheel, it is located in southeast Missouri near the Mississippi River. In the late 1800's and the early 1900's the bootheel was all large trees, most not native to the state of Missouri because of seeds from the north washed in by 1,000's of years of Mississippi River flooding. William Deering of the McCormick-Deering fame needed lumber for the machines he was building in Chicago, so starting in 1898 he bought and leased some 60,000 acres of forest land in the bootheel. In 1902 Deering was part of the merger with McCormick, Milwaukee, Plano, and Warder, Bushnell, and Glessner (Champion). So after this the Deering property became part of International Harvester.

I was told that some of the bootheel had already been drained before IH in 1904 finished draining what they needed to work. When moving in the heavy equipment to build the sawmill and town they got stuck in the gumbo mud and built the town where they stopped. They wanted to go a few more miles west but that didn't happen. The new town was called Deering Sawmill until the post office was built and it was changed to just Deering. The new business was called Wisconsin Lumber Company because the holdings were in Wisconsin.

One of the 1<sup>st</sup> orders of business was to build a railroad to haul the logs to the mill. The 1<sup>st</sup> part of the railroad was completed in 1903 using animal power and was called the D&SW (Deering & Southwestern). The workers had their own name for the railroad calling it the "Darn Slow Wiggling Railroad". By 1911 the track was finished to the Mississippi River some 12.4 miles. By this time they were using steam engines to haul lumber to the river and they also had passenger service. Before the mill went idle in 1928 IH had built and owned 27 miles of railroad track. In 1922 the Cincinnati Car Company built a 39 foot 6 inch long gasoline passenger railcar with an International Harvester engine, seating 40 people and named "Car 82". This was used to haul passengers between Deering and the Mississippi River.

All buildings in town had electric lights by 1910 run by a generator at the mill. There was running water to the houses in the 1920's and the houses were fenced in so they could have a cow or chickens in their yard. In 1916 a worker made \$3.00 a day and the company doctor cost \$1.50 a month. If you had a baby it cost an extra \$10.00 a onetime charge. The houses were rented from the company and since the company had plenty of lumber the sidewalks were made of planks of wood. The hotel was mainly built so company officials from Chicago had a place to stay. There was also a bowling alley, motion pictures, and dances in the amusement hall. Instead of money they used a type of Script and it was called Doodlum. In the early years work hours were from 6am to 6pm. In 1935 IH sold the town, mill, and 2600 acres of cleared ground for \$110,000. In 1998 the National IH Club and a local CaseIH dealer paid for a permanent history sign that was placed in downtown Deering. Darrell and Kevin Darst, editors of Harvester Highlights