

VINTAGE IRON

FIND OF THE MONTH

Struck By Lightning



By G. Wayne Walker Jr.

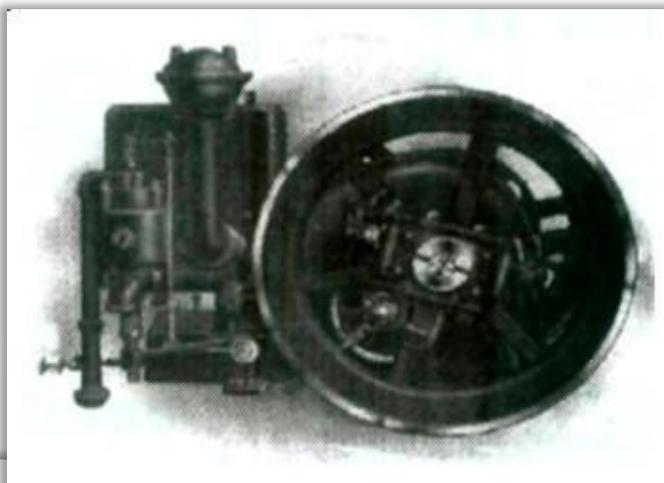
The Kansas City (Mo.) Hay Press Co. has built, by far, some of the most interesting engines and equipment manufactured at the turn of the century. The company got its start in the early 1880s, building hay presses. In about 1901, they got into the gas engine market, with the introduction of the KC Lightning Balanced Gas and Gasoline Engines. From an October 1905 ad in Gas Power Magazine: "Stationary or portable, 4 to 25 horsepower inclusive. Containing many new scientific features. No cylinder head, but two pistons operating simultaneously in opposite directions in one cylinder. Perfect governor ..."



KC Lightning balanced factory portable engine, owned by a Wisconsin collector

The 1906 line listed a 4 hp model for \$450; 5 hp, \$500; 6 hp, \$600; 8 hp, \$800; 10 hp, \$900; 12 hp, \$1,000; 15 hp, \$1,100; 18 hp, \$1,300; and 22 hp, \$1,500. For a portable, you'd add an average of \$300 to the price.

The three photos of Lightning Engines show some of the different models they built. The [factory portable](#) is owned by a Wisconsin collector. It is complete, and in good condition. This model used the frame rails for the base of the engine. The cylinder bolted to one end, and the main bearings and flywheels were at the other



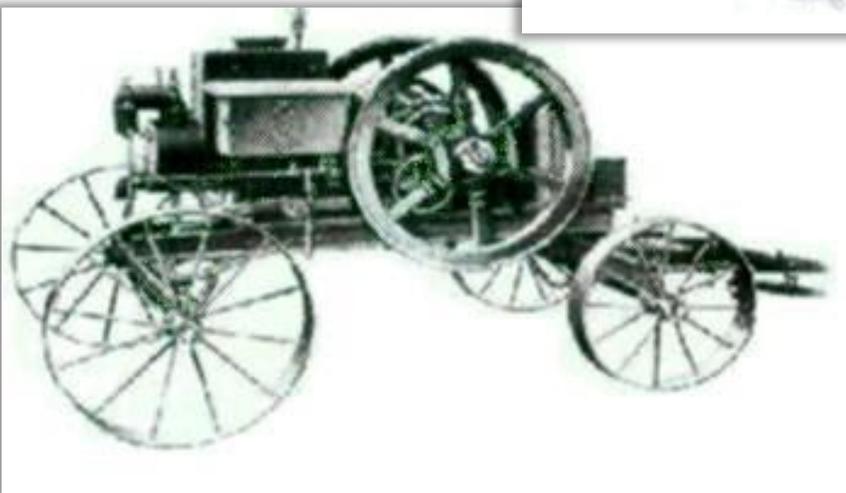
*KC Lightning juniors.
Top: late model, 6 hp,
Left: early portable 10 hp*

end. Even the trucks that this company used are different than those found on other makes of engines. The collector who owns this engine said he has had lots of offers to sell, but is keeping it in his collection.

One of the smallest Lightnings known to exist, [No. 253](#), was sold at auction in Iowa several years ago and is now owned by a

collector in North Dakota. It has been displayed at the Crosby, N.D., show for several years. This engine has the original [cast brass nameplate](#), which is in perfect condition. It also has the original Lunkheimer multi-feed oiler and is a very good running engine.

The third [Lightning](#), one of the larger models, is owned by a collector in Michigan. It was photographed running at the Portland, Ind., show a few years ago. Harold Ottaway, Wichita, Kan., the former owner, said he traded for the engine near



Richmond, Va., many years ago. A fellow collector had found the engine and told Harold about it. Harold contacted the owner, who had acquired the engine along with a section of land he'd purchased. It had been abandoned on the back 40 along with a small wood thresher. The owner, an IH dealer, said he would like to have one of those old McCormick-Deering Model M engines. Harold restored a 1-1/2 hp M, and traded it for the KC engine.

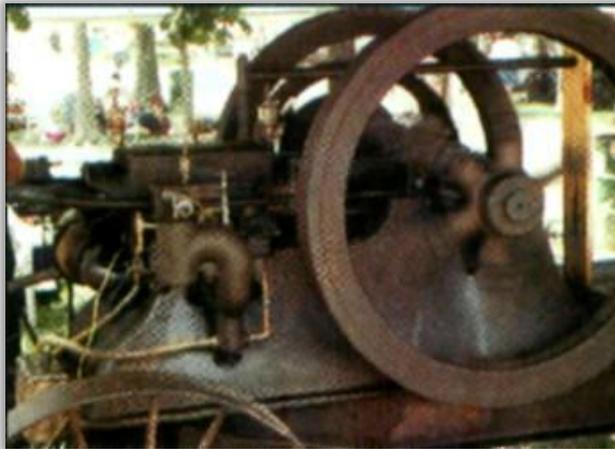
The KC Hay Press Co. also built traction engines. The first illustration is from a very early (about 1906) brochure, and shows the [10 hp traction gasoline engine](#). The advertisement reads: "The most profitable power for operating a belt press, a corn sheller, shredder or any machine requiring no greater power. This engine furnished ample power for operating and hauling above machines over the road." A 1910 Millard's Implement Directory lists a 14 and 20 HP traction for plowing.

The illustration shows the very early model with the cast-iron, round spoke wheels. They were later changed to all steel, flat-spoke wheels. The final drive was run with a cast iron chain. The traction engine had one speed forward, and one reverse, and used the Lightning engine for power. It was equipped with a clutch so the machine it was running could be stopped without stopping the engine. The list price (\$2,000) was subject to discount. Notice the whistle and friction drive magneto on this model.

The second [KC traction gas engine](#) illustration, from a 1919 Lightning catalog, shows the later Junior-style engine, a tank-cooled model with single piston, vertical governor and separate cooling tank. The illustration shows the later type flat-spoke, all-steel wheels. The use of extensive pinstriping is also evident on this model. Both of the early models used



Above: Small KC Lightning engine Number 253



Above: Large KC Lightning at the Portland, Ind. Show

a canopy top that protected the engine when it was left out in the weather.

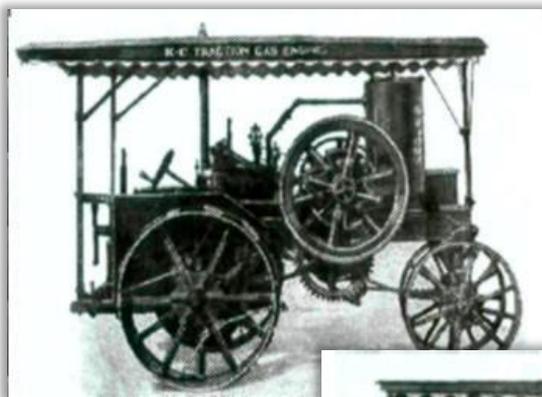
None of the KC traction engines of the early style are known to exist. If you know of any, and would like to share photos, let me know, and we'll run them in a future Vintage Iron column.

The company also built a later style tractor using a Waukesha engine called the "Prairie Dog." It was built in a model L, using a three-wheeled design first introduced in 1917. It was originally rated 9-18 hp and re-rated to 10-18 in 1920. A larger model D, 15-30, four-wheel tractor appeared in 1920, but was only built for a couple of years. I have talked to several tractor collectors, and no one knows of any of the latter types still in existence.

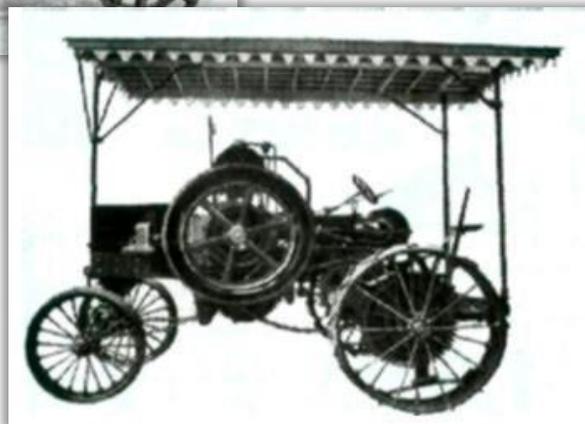
The KC Junior was introduced about 1906. The illustration shown is from a 1908 Lightning catalog. It was built in 6, 8 and 10 hp, stationary or portable. The illustration shows 8 and 10 hp portable gas engines. The larger engines in

this style use a water-cooled head, while the 6 hp use a dry head. The pulley was belted to the flywheels on most KC engine models. All KC-built engines used the prefix "KC" in the part numbers on the castings.

These are but a few of the examples of the Kansas City Hay Press Co.'s engines. To have one in your collection is a great treasure, and if you had the choice of only one engine out of all those ever built, this would be the one. FC



Above: KC Traction Engine, late model junior engine
1Right: Early model, KC Lightning Traction engine



Struck by Lightning: The Kansas City Hay Press Co. – Farm Collector (04/01/1999)