

A History of the Kreider Machine Company

by Donald J. Summar

In the early years of the twentieth century many machine shops in the United States attempted to enter the automobile industry, which was not dominated by a few large companies as it is today. Some machine shops were very successful in entering the industry. One of the successful companies was the Riverside Machine Shop, which grew to become the Apperson Brothers Automobile Company. However, for every successful machine shop there were many which failed to enter the automobile industry after one or only a few automobiles were built. One such company was the Kreider Machine Company of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, which made not one, but two, attempts to become an automobile producer.

The Kreider Machine Company was organized on January 26, 1903, to "make, buy, and sell machinery and tools and other articles of wood or metal or both." The company was capitalized at \$10,000, with stock issued in 200 shares of \$50 each.¹

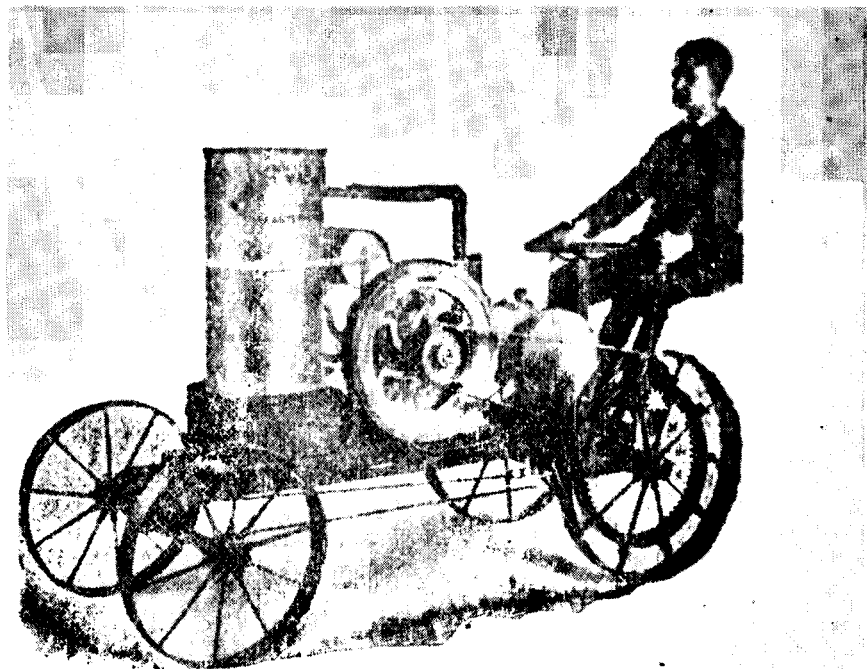
The founder of the company was Enos H. Kreider, who had been a machinist for over ten years.² The company's capital was fully paid in, the subscribers being: Enos H. Kreider, 126 shares; Ira H. Bare, 20 shares; Isaac H. Weaver, 20 shares; Elmer J. Weaver, 14 shares; B. Frank Witmer, 10 shares; and Kendig H. Bare, 10 shares.³

The company secured quarters at 36 West Chestnut Street, Lancaster, on the second floor of the old Henry Harburger machine shop building. The workroom was 40 x 140 feet, giving 5,600 square feet of floor space.⁴ Initially the company's products consisted of stationary gasoline engines, dairy machinery, and watchmakers' tools.⁵

Enos H. Kreider was president of the company. In 1903, Ira H. Bare was secretary and treasurer; in 1905, Jacob D. Rider held those positions;⁶ and in 1907, J. D. Rider was treasurer and George R. Elleston was secretary.⁷

The Kreider Machine Company made its first venture into the production of complete motor vehicles in the winter of 1905-1906.

E. H. Kreider designed a lightweight gasoline traction engine (tractor) and a prototype was completed by early 1906. The tractor was advertised as a replacement for the horse or the stationary gasoline engine as a source of power on the farm. It was not designed to do plowing.⁸



1906 Kreider Gasoline Tractor. (Courtesy of Simon Coonrod)

Hardly had advertising of the vehicle begun when disaster struck the company. A fire broke out in the company's shop late in the evening of February 13, 1906, and before it was put out the shop was completely gutted. The company lost twenty-four finished engines and parts for several tractors. In addition the company's machinery, patterns, and tools were destroyed at a total loss of \$15,000.⁹

A week after the fire the company announced that orders for engines or tractors would be booked for delivery after the shop was rebuilt and in operation again. The prototype of the Kreider tractor was put on display directly across the street from the gutted shop. The tractor had been stored in a shed at E. H. Kreider's home at 549 West Chestnut Street at the time of the fire.¹⁰

It is not known if any orders were booked for the tractor, but no more were built. The company's loss of machinery, patterns, and tools was covered by only \$10,000 insurance. Lacking sufficient money, the company abandoned plans to produce the tractor.¹¹

For almost two years the Kreider Machine Company continued in business, building gasoline engines and doing repair work, with a specialty of automobile work. Then, in early 1908 the company announced that it would manufacture two vehicles, known as the K and M motor buggies, which were pleasure cars that could be converted into delivery wagons or stationary power plants.

As a pleasure car the K and M were buggy types, with 38 inch wheels carrying 2 inch solid rubber tires and having a long "piano box" style body with canopy top, for two or four passengers. The vehicles had an angle iron frame with a subframe for engine support, full elliptic springs front and rear, external band brakes, a 102 inch wheelbase and 60 inch tread, and was equipped with two oil headlights and a tail lamp. Steering was by wheel.

The engine, which was mounted centrally under the car, was a two-cylinder 18-horsepower unit with $5\frac{1}{8}$ inch bore and $4\frac{1}{2}$ inch stroke. The engine was air cooled by two fans. Jump spark ignition by dry cells, a Schebler carburetor, and force feed lubrication of the engine were employed. The drive train was through a leather-faced clutch and two-speed-and-reverse transmission to a countershaft and then by single chain to the rear axle.

The two-passenger vehicle was essentially a half-ton delivery wagon. The four-passenger vehicle could be converted into a delivery wagon by the removal of the rear seat. The cargo space was 66 inches long and 36 inches wide. To convert either vehicle into a stationary power plant the right step to the rear seat (or cargo space) was lifted and a pulley was attached to the shaft that was exposed. The pulley was connected by a belt to any piece of farm machinery and operated like any stationary engine.¹²

As a stationary power plant the K and M buggies were essentially similar to the Kreider gasoline tractor of 1906, but were improved in every other way. Only one, or possibly two, prototypes were built. The company could not get money to finance production of the K and M motor buggies due to the aftermath of the "Panic of 1907." In 1909 the Kreider Machine Company was closed down and E. H. Kreider became machine shop and academic instructor at the newly opened Thaddeus Stevens Trade School.¹³

Nothing is left today of the Kreider vehicles except a picture of the 1906 tractor. The building that the company occupied was one of many demolished in 1929 to make way for the new United States Post Office.

REFERENCES

- ¹ Lancaster County Charter Book 2-295.
- ² *J. E. Williams' Lancaster Directory*, 1892, p. 215.
- ³ Lancaster County Charter Book 2-295.
- ⁴ Lancaster New Era, February 14, 1906.
- ⁵ *Polk's Lancaster Directory*, 1903, p. 480.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, 1905, p. 480.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, 1907, p. 480.
- ⁸ Lancaster New Era, February 12, 1906.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, February 14, 1906.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, February 20, 1906.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, February, 14, 1906.
- ¹² *Motor Age*, February 13, 1908, p. 25.
- ¹³ *Polk's Lancaster Directory*, 1909, p. 375.