

# Timeline of the Life of Clark Lane

## Inventor and Industrial Giant

By [Bob Rhode](#) and [Lee Hite](#)

### 1823

On the 5th of April, Clark Lane is born to John and Rosannah Lane, who had come to Springfield Township, Hamilton County, Ohio from New Jersey in 1793.

### 1829

Between the ages of 6 and 8, Clark Lane begins helping his father in John's blacksmith shop. Clark stands on a basket to reach the lever to blow the bellows while his father makes trace chains for neighbors.

### 1830s

Possibly as early as the 1830s, the Lane family builds inventive conveyance ports in cisterns on the well-appointed Lane family farm in Springfield Township, Hamilton County, Ohio. Normally a cistern fills from a rainwater catchment system, but, in this system, the cisterns most likely were filled with spring water. Natural spring wells proliferated along Mill Creek, so John Lane thought to take advantage of the clean spring water. This conveyance system allowed spring water to constantly fill the cisterns with the overflow draining into the 22' surface well. Should the spring well have ceased to function, the surface well would have been a backup water source. The side walls for the conveyance channels appear to be dry-stacked fieldstones that minimized overfilling by leaching excess water into the ground.

### 1835

In June in a barley field in Springfield Township, Hamilton County, Ohio, Obed Hussey enjoys a successful test of what would become his world-famous reaper, or mowing machine for wheat and similar crops. Industrialist Clark Lane, 12 years old at the time, later remembers that the reaper performed "in presence of many hilarious, expectant and over-pleased neighbors" whom Lane identified as "many farmers, mechanics and others." Clark's father, John Lane, made the parts for the machine in his smithy, which stood at a distance of some 500 paces from the barley field.

## **1844**

Clark Lane works for Lemmon and Ross in Dayton, Ohio, learning to make edge tools of high quality and to conduct machine forging. (He had left a position forging iron parts for fifty farm wagons with wagon builder John H. Brown in Hamilton, Ohio.)

## **1847**

William Lane, one of Clark Lane's brothers, builds a suspension bridge on the Lane farm in Springfield Township, Hamilton County, Ohio. Clark Lane said that William had been inspired when he studied the construction model for the Niagara Falls Suspension Bridge. By 1848, Charles Ellet, Jr., completed a temporary cable suspension bridge as part of the pre-construction setup for John Augustus Roebling's bridge over the Niagara River that was opened to public traffic in 1854. William completed his bridge a year before the temporary bridge at Niagara was open; accordingly, the Lanes called William's bridge the first suspension bridge in America. As a few other American suspension bridges had been erected before the Niagara project began, the Lane suspension bridge was not the first but among the first completed cable suspension bridges. It was certainly the first suspension bridge in Ohio.

William Lane's bridge features a length of 42' and a span of 30'. The deck support timbers (probably from the Hill sawmill) rest on abutments, each of which is formed of dry-stacked field stone 6' square and about 8' tall. The suspension cable support is from a 58" high iron tripod with 7/8" square legs positioned on an equilateral triangle with a 17" base and fitted with 2" square iron feet (not longer than 6") that rest in 2 1/2" square holes drilled into a 6" thick flat field stone and wedged into place with stone.

## **1854**

Clark Lane joins the foundry of Owens, Ebert & Dyer in Hamilton, Ohio, when Ebert passes away. Under the name of C. Lane & Co., Lane had already worked with Owens on a contract to create the iron portions of the stone constructed jail in Hamilton beginning in 1846. C. Lane & Co. had also supplied ironwork for the paper mills of McGuire, Kline & Ervin and Beckett & Rigdon. The emerging firm of Owens, Lane & Dyer becomes an industrial giant, building portable agricultural steam engines, other engines mounted on skids, and, eventually, traction engines, as well as sawmills, threshing machines, and other equipment. The company shipped engines to the West Coast. In 1858, the expanding firm is renamed Owens, Lane, Dyer & Co., and, at the end of the Civil War, the firm, now a joint stock company, is

named Owens, Lane & Dyer Machine Company. A branch of the firm in St. Louis, Missouri, was arguably as significant as the main factory in Hamilton, Ohio.

### **1863**

In Hamilton, Ohio, Clark Lane builds an octagonal house that is still standing and serves as the headquarters of the Hamilton Community Foundation.

### **1866**

The new octagonal building of the Free Public Library—Clark Lane’s gift to the city of Hamilton—is opened across from his home, which is on North Third Street. Today, the Lane Public Library’s main branch is housed in the architecturally fascinating structure. (Clark Lane also supported the libraries of Elkhart, Indiana.)

### **1876**

Clark Lane returns from Elkhart, Indiana, where he had been working in association with a son, so that he can serve as the receiver for the Owens, Lane & Dyer Machine Company, which has fallen on hard times partly because of the economic recession of 1873 that lasted for many years thereafter but also because of other factors predating 1873.

### **1879**

Clark Lane helps establish the firm of Hooven, Owens, Rentschler & Company to take over the Owens, Lane & Dyer facilities. (He also assists in creating the company of Ritchie & Dyer, which manufactures steam engines and which becomes an important firm in its own right.) Hooven, Owens & Rentschler will quickly grow as a major producer of many kinds of engines, including those that powered Henry Ford’s plant in Dearborn, Michigan.

### **1907**

Clark Lane dies on the 4th of September.

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Lee Hite leads frequent tours of Old River Station in Cincinnati, Ohio. If you have taken one or more of Lee's tours, you know how exciting it is to see the world's largest pumping engines under Lee's expert guidance. If you have not yet participated in a tour, you have a wonderful opportunity ahead of you. Simply click on [Old River Station](#) to sign up for your tour.

Bob Rhode is co-author of the nonfiction best seller [The Steam Tractor Encyclopedia](#) (available on Amazon). (One of the easiest ways to order the book is to visit the website of [Engineers and Engines Magazine](#) or to call 410-673-2414.) The hardcover book features over 600 historical pictures of farm steam engines. To preserve our agricultural heritage, *The Steam Tractor Encyclopedia* is packed with memorable stories. Bob has written sixteen books. Find out more about Bob and his publications by visiting Bob's [Books from the Heartland](#) website.