

# Wright "Rosetta Stone" is Found!

By: Raymond L. Drake and Robert T. Rhode

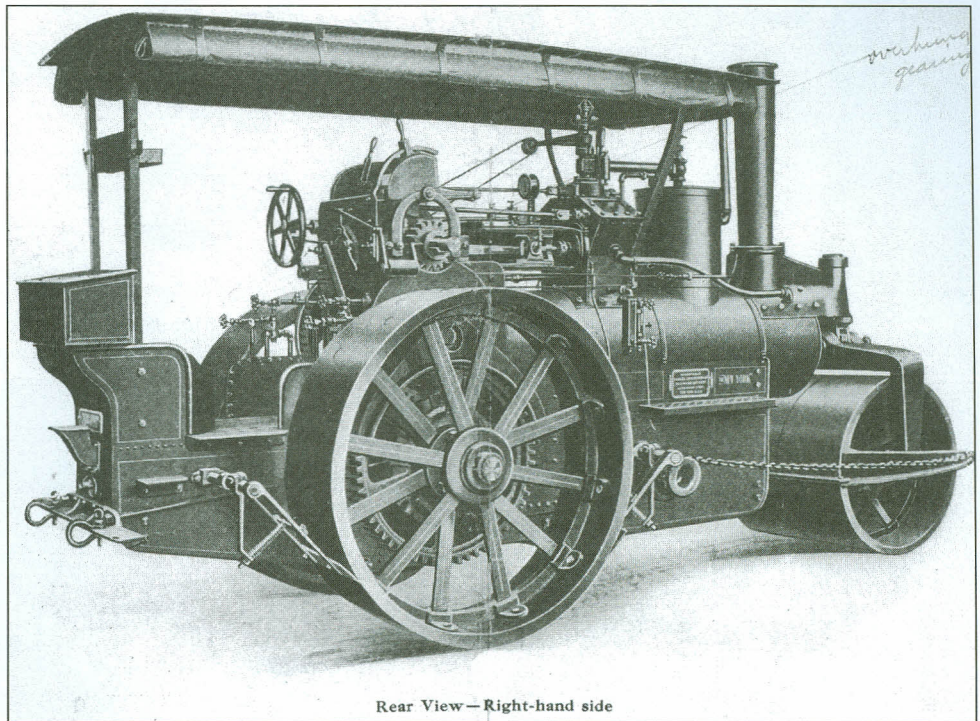
In a follow-up to their article that appeared in the January 2007 issue of *Old Glory* and that was reprinted in the June-July 2008 issue of *Engineers and Engines*, authors **Raymond L. Drake** and **Robert T. Rhode** reveal more details relating to the design of American-built steamrollers and the influence of British-born Edward T. Wright on these.

While our story on the influence of British designs on American steamrollers was being printed in the January 2007 issue of *Old Glory* (See the Winter 2008 issue of *Steam Traction*.), we discovered a rare catalog containing what could easily be termed the "Rosetta Stone" of the Wright saga. This important historical document featured the products of the Port Huron Road Roller Company of Port Huron, Michigan. The opening pages chronicled a history of seven early American road roller manufacturers, many of which had been the subjects of investigation in our article. The information in the tattered pages of this one-of-a-kind catalog was so significant that we felt compelled to share it with readers on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. We are pleased to acknowledge that the new details enhance—but do not contradict—what we presented in our essay last January.

In the late 1800s, Charles Longenecker designed steamrollers for Pennsylvania's Harrisburg Car Company, builders of railroad carriages. Prior to 1890, he joined New York-based Julian Scholl & Company, an agency that distributed Iroquois brand rollers and subsequently began selling O. S. Kelly rollers, built in Springfield, Ohio. Around 1895, Scholl also became the New York City distributor for Russell steamrollers.

In the early 1890s, steamroller manufacturers reached various agreements about sales territories. Among the firms entering into these collaborative arrangements were O. S. Kelly, the Buffalo Pitts Company, and Harrisburg Car. Buffalo Pitts and O. S. Kelly soon developed a close working relationship. Within a quarter of a century, they merged.

Longenecker correctly perceived that, with the boom in road construction, there were great profits to be made in the steamroller industry. Around 1895, the Russell Company hired Longenecker to design a steamroller under the Russell trademark.



Rear View—Right-hand side

*This is a right rear view of the New York-Port Huron Standard steamroller. Numerous similarities between this machine and the Oastler, American, and Monarch rollers may be attributed to the cross-fertilization of design concepts involving roller engineers Charles Longenecker and Edward T. Wright. ROBERT T. RHODE COLLECTION.*

The Longenecker Russell steamroller was one of at least three distinct types of Russell rollers. One type was modeled on the agricultural traction engine that Charles M. Giddings modeled beginning in 1882. Another displayed Longenecker's design. Yet another was an especially rugged machine having a massive kingpin housing.

The Weston Engine Company of Painted Post, New York, began in 1896, and Longenecker became the firm's vice president. Weston was a builder of stationary engines and a forerunner of Ingersoll Rand.

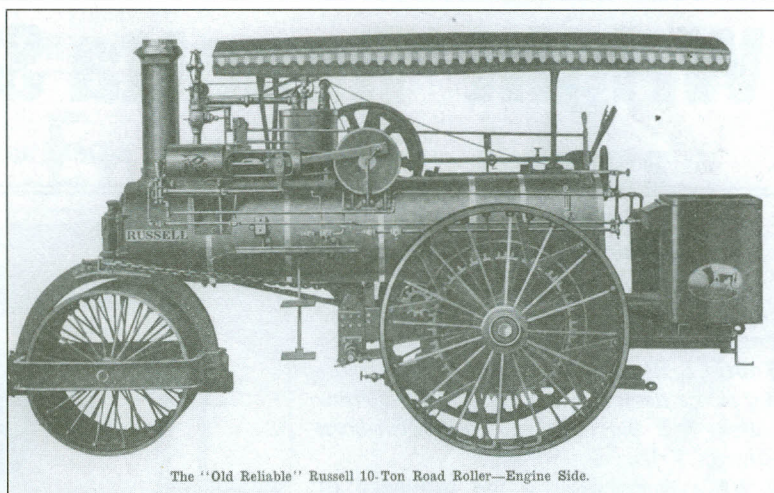
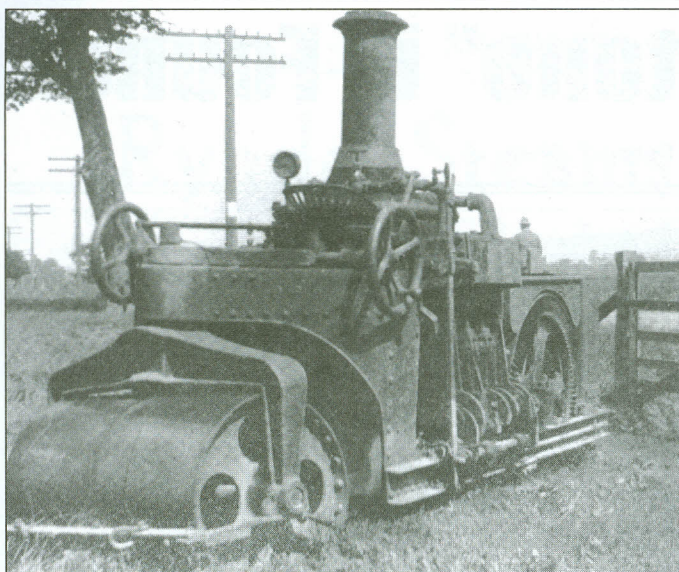
By 1901, O. S. Kelly and Buffalo Pitts jointly acquired the Russell steamroller division. In 1902 and 1903, Longenecker served as agent for Buffalo Pitts rollers in New England and southern New York. In the following year, Longenecker began designing and manufacturing the larger models of Scholl's "Universal" roller. In 1905, Longenecker abruptly left Scholl and organized his own company.

Between November of 1905 and the early months of 1906, Edward T. Wright and Longenecker designed the "New

York" steamroller and an innovative scarifier. Wright and Longenecker had met in 1889 when Wright immigrated to Harrisburg to begin working as a draftsman for the Harrisburg Car Company. Wright had served his apprenticeship in England in the shops of Aveling & Porter at Rochester, Kent, and was well versed in standard road roller design. As we reported in the January 2007 issue of *Old Glory*, between 1890 and 1891, Wright had moved to Springfield, Ohio, to create steamrollers for O. S. Kelly. In 1903, Wright had contributed the "American" roller for the American Road Roller Company.

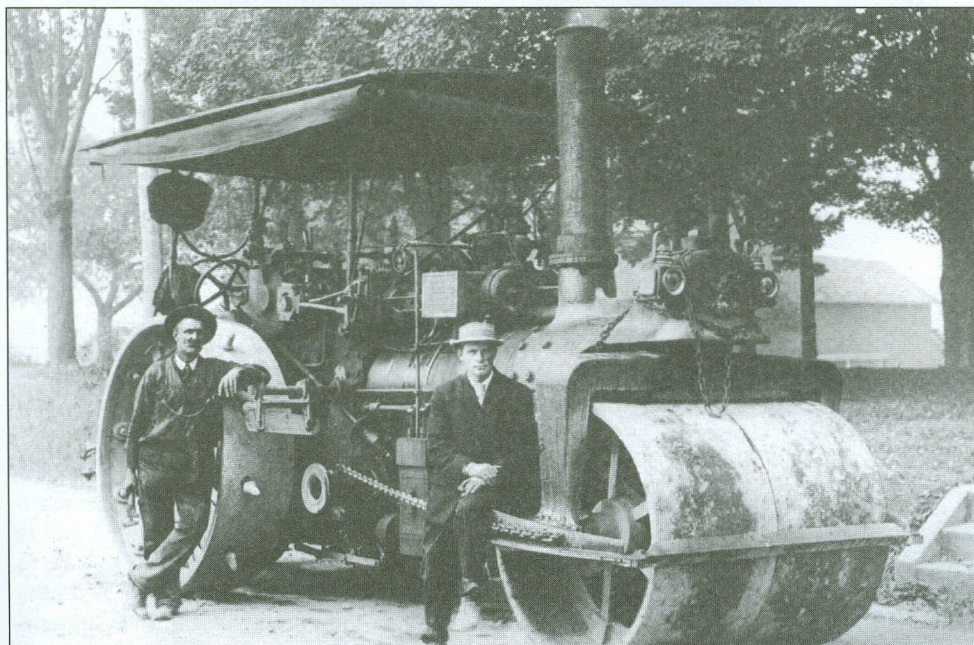
In 1910, the Port Huron Company in Michigan bought Longenecker's New York roller and scarifier business. The new roller bore little resemblance to the Port Huron steamroller depicted in the annual catalog for 1908, for the original Port Huron roller was modeled on the firm's agricultural traction engine. As may be concluded from these newly found historical details, Longenecker and Wright had much to do with shaping the evolution of American steamrollers.





The "Old Reliable" Russell 10-Ton Road Roller—Engine Side.

Above: This illustration shows one of the Russell Company's first attempts at building a steamroller. The unusual "front and back" yoke design is similar to that of the Enterprise Manufacturing Company's "Columbian" steamroller, built in Columbiana, Ohio. The Russell firm produced at least three distinct types of road rollers. As only a couple of pictures have surfaced showing this model, the authors suspect it was produced in limited numbers. GARY YAEGER COLLECTION



Taken in New York in 1905, this photograph depicts an Oastler variation equipped with a belly tank. Note that the engine is significantly different from those portrayed in the Cooke Locomotive Works catalog in the collection of Derek Rayner and featured in both the January 2007 issue of *Old Glory* and the Winter 2008 issue of *Steam Traction*. This machine has lanterns mounted to either side of the king post, as is characteristic of British practice; most American rollers used a single headlight attached to the top of the kingpin. The products of the Oastler firm are the only known American rollers to have used this method of mounting twin lamps. RAYMOND L. DRAKE COLLECTION

Top Left: This O. S. Kelly tandem roller dates from 1892, the first year of production for these machines, as evidenced by the yoke over the steering roll, the bottom edge of which pitches upward toward the king post. Starting in 1893, the yoke was redesigned to have a perfectly level edge where the yoke meets the roll. Other than engravings, only a few photographs exist of such rollers, this one being the best. The machine is pictured at Carmel, just north of Indianapolis, Indiana, in 1910. RAYMOND L. DRAKE COLLECTION

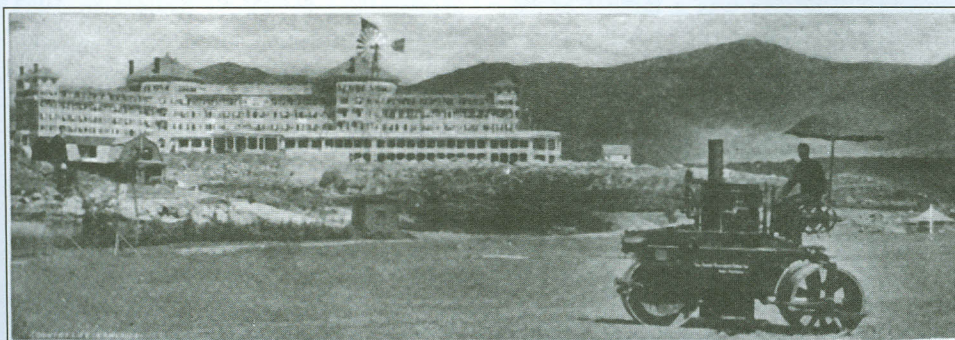
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Left: This is one of Scholl's advertisements for the firm's Universal steamroller shown in front of the Mount Washington Hotel in New Hampshire. Coincidentally, an historic steam-operated cog railway climbs to the top of this mountain.



Our UNIVERSAL STEAM ROLLER on the links at the new Mt. Washington Hotel, White Mountains.

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