

Hiram Amandus Frantz:

STORY OF A PENNSYLVANIA PREACHER/INVENTOR

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In the summer of 1976 I saw a huge one cylinder engine in operation at the Blue Mountain Gas & Steam Engine Meet at Jacktown, Pennsylvania. I learned that it was a Dieter engine rated at 15 HP, and that the present owner uses it to power a silo filling blower. I was astonished at this use, but the owner assured me it is a very reliable and powerful engine, weighing at least three tons.

Evidently, several other Dieter engines are still in existence, perhaps unidentified, as there are very few identification marks or name plates on this make.

I soon realized that the Dieter engine was made by the Dieter Foundry in Cherryville, Pennsylvania, a village that I can see across the Lehigh River from my farm at Rising Sun. A former neighbor of mine, Mr. Leslie Remaley had worked at Dieter's Foundry between 1930 and 1940, so I spoke to him about the Dieter engine. He referred to it as a Frantz engine, saying that the credit for its design should be given to a Rev. Frantz. He told me the engines had no longer been in production when he worked there, as a fire had destroyed the patterns, and demand for one cylinder engines had dropped because electric motors and farm tractors were in common use by 1930. Mr. Remaley referred me to a mutual acquaintance, Hiram Frantz, who knows much about the early years of automobiles and one cylinder engines used on the farm and in the home. Mr. Frantz is the namesake of his uncle, Rev. Hiram Amandus Frantz, and he unfolded this story:

The Reverend Frantz was born in 1864, near Schiedy, Lehigh County, Pennsylvania, one of eleven children.

The first known evidence of his mechanical ability was a modification of a treadle powered sewing machine. Rev. Frantz served as pastor of a church in the Tamaqua, PA area from 1895 to 1900 during which time his wife was injured and lost some use of her feet. To enable her to use a sewing machine, Rev. Frantz designed and built a wind up mechanism for her sewing machine so that she used her feet only to operate a brake pedal. The sewing machine with its wind up mechanism is still in the possession of Mr. Frantz. It was patented and marketed by Rev. Frantz.

In 1900, Rev. Frantz became the pastor of churches at Cherryville and Kreidersville, PA. He developed a close friendship with Dieter's Foundry owners and they gave Rev. Frantz an outlet for his mechanical ability. Working together, with Frantz designing and the Dieters producing, the one cylinder gasoline and kerosene engines became a reality.

Now came the big challenge to Rev. Frantz, for some time between 1900 and 1905 there is evidence that he designed and built at least one or more automobiles. Whether he did this himself, or with the help of Dieter's Foundry is not known, but he must have had contact with another early auto concern, the Nadig Machine Shop of Allentown, PA. Hiram Frantz remembers that his father, Tilghman Frantz chided his brother, Rev. Frantz, for hitching only one horse (one cylinder) to his car, when two or four horses (cylinders) would do a better job and wouldn't have to work so hard!

Shortly after his experiment with a gas car, Rev. Frantz was involved with the design of a steam car in Reading, PA. There is no record of what make it was, whether or not it was successful, but Rev. Frantz reportedly drove his gas car to and from Reading. The burner on the steam car was appar-

ently very efficient, the design being not unlike the arrangement of the magnets on a model T Ford flywheel, with many flame openings to heat the water. Mr. Frantz remembers using a boiler of his uncle's design on the farm along with the gas engines to power machinery. Rev. Frantz also designed a gas engine that did not have a crankshaft as we know it, but rather a figure eight groove cut in a shaft, in which groove a pin was moved by the piston, causing the shaft to revolve. Sadly, Mr. Frantz recalls that he had a working model of this engine his uncle designed, but like the farm's gas and steam engines, a sledge hammer destroyed it.

Shortly before World War I, Rev. Frantz designed a four wheel drive mechanism, but lacking financial backing, and probably not realizing its potential value, sold it for \$800. His wife thought the offer too low, but he said since very few people would be interested in this invention, he would accept it. Who bought the design is not known, but surely many army vehicles were built thereafter based on Rev. Frantz's idea. He frequently claimed that many auto builders later used the same basic ideas that he had used before 1905. He evidently decided it was cheaper to buy rather than build an improved model car, and he owned a cross-engined Franklin from 1910-1914. Hiram remembers riding in the real bucket seats of this car, and recalls that Rev. Frantz and his wife moved to Florida in 1914 for health reasons. The Franklin car, a horse and some small farm machinery, along with their household goods, were all loaded in a railroad box car for the journey. Rev. Frantz died in 1936.

I am sure that more could be written about Rev. Frantz and his inventions and if anyone has more information about him, it will be greatly appreciated. If ever you have the opportunity to see a Dieter engine, pause and think about Rev. Hiram Amandus Frantz, a preacher and inventor who used his talents for both God and fellow man. □