

## The First Fairmont Railway Motor Car

Fairmont's Railway Motors, Inc., may not have developed into the company it became if not for a railroad section hand living in Fairmont that was tired of pumping his hand car by hand. This individual, Fred Mahlman Sr., as reported in the February 26, 1941, edition of the *Fairmont Daily Sentinel*, was employed as a railroad section hand, and he didn't like "pumping." He would have to be out in all kinds of weather, put in long hours, and then at the end of the day he would have to "pump" the handcar back to Fairmont. This was a very tiresome proposition.

Mr. Mahlman thought that it would be great to have a motor on his handcar. He speculated that they worked for the automobile, why not for a hand car. He saw an advertisement in a newspaper that the Cushman Company of Lincoln, Nebraska, was manufacturing a four horse power engine to attach to grain binders for cutting grain. He contacted them and received more information.

Shortly thereafter, he found out that the Fairmont Machine Shop was putting out a two horse power upright engine. Consequently, he purchased one, tried it out for several months, and determined that it really didn't accomplish what he wanted. As a result of this, he contacted the superintendent of the machine shop and asked if they could make one to order, with Mr. Mahlman's ideas that would in turn fulfill his needs. They did, and although it had more power, additional improvements were still needed. As Mr. Mahlman's ideas regarding the motor car were evolving, he and the superintendent would take it out evenings and on Sundays in order to test it and to determine potential additional improvements. Finally, they had what they considered a "pretty good motor car."

Mr. Mahlman was then asked by the superintendent of the Fairmont Machine Company to write a detailed report about the motor car. In this report, he stated what he could do with the motor car, how many ties it would haul, how many miles per hour it traveled, as well as gas mileage details. Printed copies of this report were then sent to all the railroads.

Within a few weeks, Mr. Mahlman received so many replies that it proved impossible for him to answer them. Therefore, he took his correspondence to the machine shop office and let them handle the replies. Within a couple of years, orders were coming in to the then little known Fairmont Machine Company so fast that they were unable to manufacture the motors fast enough.

This, at that time, proved to be a driving force in the start of Fairmont Railway Motors, Inc. From that small beginning, which was a result of a tired railroad worker who thought that there must be a better way, an industry developed that could certainly be considered to be the most significant industry in the early history of Fairmont and Martin County. Had Mr. Mahlman purchased an engine from the Cushman Company in Nebraska, one can only speculate as to how the future of Fairmont Railway Motors, Inc.,

and Martin County, may have been affected, as this development undoubtedly had far reaching effects on the economy of this area.

To find out more about this article and Fairmont Railway Motors, Inc., visit the Pioneer Museum in Fairmont.