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John D. Rust papers finding aid

Title: John D. Rust papers

Collection No: MSS.0115

Extent: 0.25 cubic feet

Inclusive Dates: 1933-1962

Abstract: This collection contains correspondence and copies of patents applied for by mechanical cotton picker pioneer John D. Rust.

Processed by: Robert D. Bohanan, 1978 January; Grace Neeley, 2022 December.

Access: Open to all researchers.

Language: English

Preferred Citation: John D. Rust papers, Special Collections Department, University Libraries, University of Memphis

Publication date: 2022 December

Biographical Information

John D. Rust was born on September 6, 1892, near Necessity, Texas, to Benjamin Daniel Rust, a farmer and schoolteacher, and Susan Minerva Burnett, a homemaker. As a youngster, Rust did farm work and displayed an aptitude for mechanical tinkering. His parents died when he was sixteen, and he drifted around Texas, Oklahoma, and Kansas. In 1924, Rust married Faye Pinkston and had two children. After they divorced, he married Thelma Ford of Leesville, Louisiana, in 1933.

Rust began work on a cotton harvesting machine in the 1920's. In 1928, his brother Mack, who held a degree in mechanical engineering from the University of Texas, joined him. Rust received his first patent in 1933. In 1935, still in pursuit of financial backers, the Rust brothers relocated to Memphis, Tennessee, the center of the Cotton South, and they founded the Rust Cotton Picker Company, successor to the Southern Harvester Company. In 1943, Rust set out to redesign his spindle device in order to make it more durable. In 1949, Rust entered into an agreement with the Ben Pearson Company of Pine Bluff, an Arkansas company known for archery equipment. Rust moved to Pine Bluff to act as engineering consultant. Pearson went on to market Rust pickers internationally.

By 1953, Rust and his brother were granted 47 U.S. patents (issued or pending for various designs). In 1952, Rust felt his work was complete. He had produced a machine which was simple, durable, inexpensive, efficient, and easy to operate and maintain. The Rust cotton picker achieved commercial success, and Rust, after years of hardship, was a wealthy man. He repaid his sponsors and established scholarships at colleges in Arkansas and Mississippi. John D. Rust died on January 20, 1954, just as the use of mechanical cotton pickers moved the South into a revolutionary new era of agribusiness. He is buried in Graceland Cemetery at Pine Bluff, Arkansas.

Scope and contents

The collection includes copies of correspondence, 1937-1962, collected by James Rust, a 32-page paper written by John Rust in 1952 entitled "The Origin and Development Of The Cotton Picker", and copies of patents which Rust applied for between 1933 and 1953.

Subject terms

Cotton-picking machinery
Patents.
Rust, John D.

Processing information

This collection was acquired by the West Tennessee Historical Society which received a grant from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission for processing.

Inventory

Box 1

Folder

- 0 James Rust correspondence collection (2009), 1937-1962.
- 1 Manuscript, Rust, John, "The Origin and Development of the Cotton Picker", 1952.
Patents: John D. Rust et al:
- 2 1,894,198. Cotton-picking machine, 1935 January 10
- 3 1,910,307. Cotton gathering machine, 1933 May 23
- 4 Reissue, 19,411. cotton gathering machine, 1935 January 1
- 5 2,023,491. Cotton-picking machine, 1935 December 10
- 6 2,058,513. Cotton picker, 1936 October 27
- 7 2,058,514. Cotton-picking machine, 1936 October 27
- 8 2,073,653. Cotton-picking roaching, 1937 March 16
- 9 2,076,598. Cotton-picking machine, 1937 April
- 9a 2,085,046. Cotton-picking machine, 1937 June 29
- 10 2,101,100. Cotton-picking machine, 1937 December 7
- 11 2,109,506. Cotton-picking spindle, 1938 March 1
- 12 2,143,901. Cotton-picking machine, 1939 January 17
- 13 2,162,750. Cotton-picking machine, 1939 June 20
- 14 2,175,216. Self-propelled tandem cotton-picking machine, 1939 October 10
- 15 2,200,303. Cotton-picking machine, May 14, 1940
- 16 2,241,423. Self-propelled cotton-picking machine, 1941 May 13
- 17 2,268,623. Cotton-picking machine, 1942 January 6
- 18 2,440,450. Spindle Slats for cotton harvesters, 1948 April 27
- 19 2,458,531. Automatic Stop for cotton harvesters, 1949 January 11
- 20 2,482,216. Cotton-picking machine, 1949 September 20
- 21 2,482,557. Capillarity controlled wick, 1949 September 20
- 22 2,485,845. Cotton picker spindle roughening means, 1949 October 25
- 23 2,486,884. Spindle doffing device, 1949 November 1
- 24 2,502,063. Cotton-picking machine, 1950 March 28
- 25 2,505,143. Cotton-picking machine, 1950 April 25
- 26 2,510,258. Device for detecting bent spindles, 1950 June 6
- 27 2,525,184. Spindle moistener mechanism, 1950 October 10
- 28 2,533, 630. Safety means for cotton harvesters, 1950 December 12
- 29 2,533,631. End clip for cotton-picker spindle slats, 1950 December 12
- 30 2,548,069. Cotton picker spindle slat fastening means, 1951 April 10
- 31 2,567,301. Suds forming and moisture supplying means for spindle moistening apparatus, 1951 September 11
- 32 2,607,178. Cotton fluffer for cotton-picking machines, 1952 August 19
- 33 2,613,492. Cotton picking machine, 1952 October 14
- 34 2,629,221. Cotton stripping comb, 1953 February 24

35 2,635,736. Automatic slat-belt tightener for cotton-picking machines, 1953 April 21
36 2,637,156. Cotton picker spindle moistening apparatus, 1953 May 5