



# The *Eisenhower* ROTOTILLER

By **Charlie Zuck**  
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**A**nyone in their late fifties or older will recognize the gentleman in the suit as Dwight D. Eisenhower, 34th President of the United States. Just about every old photo has a story to tell, and this one is no exception. I bought this photo about ten years ago because it was of a Rototiller, which is what I collect, being presented to one of our presidents. I often wondered about the photo; was the tiller still at the Eisenhower farm? Who were the two young men? Are they still alive? What did they do with their lives, and why did they choose to give President Eisenhower a tiller?

In 2011, I visited the Eisenhower Farm and took a copy of the photo along. I asked our tour guide if he ever saw this Rototiller and he replied that he had not. However, he did put me in contact with the Eisenhower farm curator, Mr. Michael Florer. In a phone conversation he told me he thought it may be at an off-site storage facility because they do not have room for everything at



the farm. A few weeks went by, and I received an email with several photos of the tiller. I was excited; it was still there!

Mr. Florer explained that they had not known much about the tiller, why it was there, or how it got there. I could tell that the original engine had been replaced, but it looked to be in pretty good shape. Seeing and knowing the tiller was still in existence and at the farm planted the seed to find out the rest of the story.

I took a close look at the photo to the left and noted the American Legion logo and the word "Boys" and what looked like the letters "NTIUN." Prior to this it was assumed it was two young men representing the Future Farmers of America as *Garden Way's* publication *Gardening Beyond the Plow* had reported. A Google search came up with Boys Nation and that they are a group under the American Legion. The group was started in 1946 and continues today. Two boys from each state represent Boys Nation in Washington, D.C., where they receive an education on the structure and operation of the federal government. They elect a president and vice president, and the rest act as senators and learn how to handle bills by U.S. Senate rules. They attend lectures and visit federal agencies, institutions, memorials, and historic sites. At the Capitol, they meet with their elected officials from their home states. The idea was to expose these youth to the operations of government with the hopes that some would desire to become involved in politics.

The American Legion sent me a scan from the September 1955 issue of their magazine that identified the two young men in the photo

**OPPOSITE:**  
Courtesy National Park Service, Eisenhower National Historic Site.

**BOTTOM:**  
Courtesy of Forrest MacCormack Photo.



and where they lived. Douglas J. Hopper from California is standing next to the President, and Kenneth R. Jennison from Missouri is standing next to Douglas. I received several documents from the Eisenhower Library located in Abilene, Kansas, along with scans of five other photos of the event. According to the documents, the Rototiller was provided by the Suitland Tractor Company located in Suitland, Maryland, and presented to the President by the Boys Nation. The previous month Mr. James A. West, from the company, had requested a visit to the Gettysburg farm to check the soil to make sure the proper tines were installed. A rotary mulch mower attachment was also included for the tiller. Most likely the mower would be similar to the one in



the photo below. The tiller that was given to the President is a Rototiller Model 2 with a Clinton 2 hp engine and chopper-digger tines.

I found very little information on the Suitland Tractor Company other than it was in business from 1951 until 1975. There is an artist's drawing of their building in a booklet published by Rototiller, Inc. I did find the photo below of their delivery truck on the Internet. I checked with various organizations in the Maryland area for information on this company, and there seems to be no record of it and searching for information on Mr. James A. West has been fruitless as well.

Through a Google search, I located a Douglas Hopper, MD, in California who matched in age and occupation of the person I was looking for. A Google search had indicated that Douglas Hopper had attended medical school. I took a chance and wrote to this Douglas Hopper, MD. After a few days I received an email from him and my hunch was correct. He was the one I was looking for. Dr. Hopper has a family medical practice, and has training in psychiatry and holistic medicine. He has been very active in medical reform and develops medical delivery systems for large managed care companies. We had several exchanges of emails where I learned about his recollections of that day in 1955.

Concerning the event with the President, Dr. Hopper commented: "He was pleasant and even a little awkward. It was a pleasant, blue-skied day. The Rototiller had a big red ribbon on it and Ike cut it away. He congratulated us on our achievements and encouraged us to be good citizens. We thanked him for taking good care of the country."

I asked Dr. Hopper if he knew who made the decision to give a Rototiller to the President, and he has no idea. He said that was all decided before they got to Washington, which is evident by the earlier visit by Mr. West to the farm. I can only suggest that the decision was made by someone in the Boys Nation organization well in advance of the gathering in D.C. So the *why* and *who* will remain unanswered.

Dr. Hopper has some interesting pictures of that time such as shaking hands with President Eisenhower, standing on the Capitol steps with Ken Jennison, shaking hands with Vice President Nixon, and the group photo of all the attendees of Boys Nation. He especially

commented on one: "But, one which fascinates me because of its simplicity is a picture of me, sitting with a group of five supporters, apparently in an intense political caucus moment. I look very serious and cunning. There is Phil Singer, one of the politicians fixed in the intense discussion. Ken Jennison has my ear at the moment of the photo. Point being, there was Phil, high in the councils of the Boys Nation president, all looking very normal, while black people couldn't get on a white bus. We 17-year-olds took it all for granted, while the country at large was in a spasm about race." Phil Singer was Dr. Hopper's fellow Boys Nation member from California and one of two black Americans at the event. The adults of the day could have learned something from these young men!

I learned that Kenneth R. Jennison died in 1993. The Ford World Headquarters employed him as an employee relations associate. He also was an ordained Baptist minister, serving as pastor of the Madison Heights Baptist Church in Michigan from 1975 to 1979. He served in the U.S. Army for four years and was an avid collector and restorer of Ford Mustangs.

This photo from *Gardening Beyond the Plow* shows the 36x51-inch Eisenhower tiller photo at the headquarters in Troy, New York. It hung there until the late 1970s when Garden Way decided it was time to take it down to reflect Garden Way instead of Rototiller. While there was a lot of Rototiller history in that building, it was time to update.

It has been interesting discovering what these two young men did and are doing with their lives. I am sure they touched many lives in a positive way on their journey here. The whole presentation event, which was held in the Rose Garden at the White House, lasted approximately fifteen minutes according to the President's appointment log for that day. I would think it was a day that all the participants long remembered. I will always look at this photo differently and will think about those two young men and what they accomplished.

If you get to the Gettysburg area, stop in and tour the Eisenhower farm. It is a very interesting tour and a walk back in time. Ask about the tiller; maybe they will put it in a display at the farm one day. 🌱

*The following organizations provided information for this article:*

- American Legion
- The American Legion Magazine
- The National Park Service, Eisenhower National Historic Site
- Dwight D. Eisenhower Library and Museum
- Dr. Douglas J. Hopper
- Forrest MacCormack Photo
- The Canton Observer newspaper in Michigan
- MTD and Gardening Beyond the Plow

*I cannot forget my good friend, Allen Cluett, who lived much of the Rototiller/Troy-Bilt history as the son of J.G. Cluett, Vice President of sales for Rototiller, Inc. Allen spent many years working for Troy-Bilt and has been a great help in my quest to learn about Rototiller, Inc. and Troy-Bilt.*



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