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A TRUE TALE OF RAGS TO RICHES (Published in the January 2006 issue of Inside Columbia.) - 1/1/2006

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A TRUE TALE OF RAGS TO RICHES

COLUMBIA, Mo. – It's a truly American story. A farmboy who tinkers with watches has an idea for a product that he is sure will change the world.

He and his sidekicks pursue the vision, devoting sweat and dollars to the project, while others snicker and roll their eyes. After years of fits and starts, they hit the jackpot and succeed beyond their wildest dreams.

The simple man becomes a wealthy folk hero. With the levers of power now in his hands, he begins to believe the hype about himself and his marvelous talents. He becomes a tyrant, surrounds himself with sycophants, takes a mistress, humiliates his only son, and dabbles in pursuits such as politics and publishing, about which he knows little.

Reminiscent of *Citizen Kane*, the story is most fascinating because it is all too real. *The People's Tycoon* unveils the life of Henry Ford, whose Model T changed American culture forever. Published in 2005 by Alfred A. Knopf, the book's author is Steven Watts, a history professor at the University of Missouri-Columbia.

Watts expertly weaves the complex threads of Ford's passions and foibles into an intriguing biography of a giant of American industry. He uncovers the secrets of Ford's successes and failures by unlocking the keys to the man's character. From his penchant for publicity to his

astonishing anti-Semitism, few stones are left unturned in this study of an American life.

By the end of his life, Watts' hero feels pangs of loss and grasps for the past by collecting antiques, hosting old-fashioned dance parties, and reminiscing about the simpler time of his childhood. When his son dies unexpectedly of stomach cancer, partially brought on by ill treatment from his father, the old man is wracked by guilt. He tries to return as president of his company, but he is now a doddering reflection of the man he once was.

Whether your main interest lies in business, history or biography, this story is good reading for all Americans.

